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C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 000271

SIPDIS

DHAHRAN SENDS,  
PASS TO NEA/ARP JOSHUA HARRIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/09/2019

TAGS: [CVIS](#) [ECON](#) [ENRG](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [SA](#) [TPHY](#)

SUBJECT: SAUDIS PAY MIT \$50 MILLION TO CONDUCT JOINT  
RESEARCH

Classified By: CG Joseph Kenny for reasons 1.4(b), (d)

¶1. (SBU) Key Points:

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-- The premier Saudi university, KFUPM, will provide MIT with U.S. \$50 million over seven years to conduct joint research on clean water and clean energy.

-- This is the largest ever Saudi-funded research collaboration with a foreign academic institution.

-- Between 20 and 50 KFUPM faculty and graduate students will visit MIT each year and MIT faculty will regularly visit KFUPM.

-- MIT faculty visiting the Kingdom for kickoff meetings last month received one entry, short-term visas.

¶2. (C) Comment:

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-- King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) views this pricey partnership with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) as a step towards rebuilding its once prestigious reputation. Not only will their faculty be able to conduct joint research with MIT's best and brightest, but KFUPM will also be able to put their name alongside MIT's on any resulting technological innovations and patents.

-- Although KFUPM has requested Consulate General Dhahran's support in attaining five year, multiple entry visas for their faculty; their American counterparts at MIT have been unsuccessful in securing full validity Saudi visas. Post continues to hear about similar cases where the SAG fails to implement the nearly one-year old visa reciprocity agreement.

End key points and comment.

¶3. (SBU) \$50 MILLION RESEARCH COLLABORATION. On January 12, PolOff, PAO, and Education Advisor met with representatives from MIT and KFUPM to discuss the research collaboration. KFUPM, widely recognized as the best undergraduate university in Saudi Arabia, will provide the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) with U.S. \$50 million to conduct joint research on clean water and clean energy technology over the next seven year period. A representative from KFUPM noted that this was the largest ever Saudi funding allocated for cooperation with a foreign academic institution. The joint research will be conducted primarily at MIT facilities in the U.S., though MIT faculty will also regularly visit KFUPM.

¶4. (C) TWO YEARS IN THE MAKING. The KFUPM administration approached MIT two years ago about conducting joint research on clean water and clean energy. (Note. Several KFUPM

faculty, administrators, and alumni have privately discussed its much diminished reputation as a leading engineering program. They believe that KFUPM sees their unilateral \$50 million payment to MIT to conduct joint research as an investment in rebuilding their institution's reputation and prestige and enhancing their faculty (primarily for recruitment purposes) End note).

15. (C) FACULTY EXCHANGES AND OTHER VISA ISSUES. MIT faculty overseeing this collaboration foresee roughly 20 to 50 KFUPM faculty and graduate students visiting Massachusetts each year to conduct joint research. MIT expects that roughly 30 of its faculty and graduate students will regularly visit Saudi Arabia during the seven year collaboration period outlined in the agreement. MIT and KFUPM have asked Consulate General Dhahran for its help in facilitating the issuance of five year, multiple entry visas for KFUPM's Saudi and non-Saudi faculty and students participating in this research project. However, all of the American MIT faculty have received one entry, short-term visas and continue to be unsuccessful in obtaining five year, multiple entry Saudi visas (the duration of visas that the U.S. provides Saudi applicants for identical purpose of travel).

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